

Unusual occurrences of the Orange ladybird *Halysia sedecimguttata* (L.) (Col.: Coccinellidae) in the London Area, 1998-2000

In the afternoon of 7 March, 2000, Gill and Keith Walker noted large numbers of a "large, orange ladybird" while walking between Jack Hill and the Furze Ground, Epping Forest (grid reference TQ 4398). On the following day, Ken Hill verified the identification of large numbers of *Halysia sedecimguttata*. Like most of central Epping Forest, the location consists primarily of large beech *Fagus sylvatica* trees with a few oak *Quercus* spp.; there is no under-storey and there are no sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* in the immediate vicinity. The beetles were mainly in clusters of up to a hundred, predominantly under branches, and in various concavities of the trunk and branch stumps. Only a few individuals were seen on oak trees. Subsequent examination of leaf litter revealed no ladybirds, but large numbers were found in deposits of beech mast often huddled together within the shells. No examples were seen on mouldering deadwood. On 8 March, many ladybirds were seen to take flight and numbers had reduced considerably, but by 11 March hundreds still remained, though with maximum cluster size around twenty-five. On that date, sunny but with a cool wind, flight started after 10.30 hours.

This incident was discussed amongst local naturalists and Jeremy Dagley, Ecologist for Epping Forest, noted that a similar large aggregation had been found by Amanda Samuels in the early spring of 1998 on old, pollarded beeches at High Beach (TQ 4097) about three kilometres to the east of the other find. This population has persisted, but the aggregations are largest and most notable during March-April. There have been several other finds this year, including one in Walthamstow Forest (TQ 3990) which was on oak, all other Epping Forest sightings being on beech.

This mycetophagous beetle was formerly considered uncommon, even nationally scarce although Majerus *et al* (1997). The geographic distributions of ladybirds (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae) in Britain (1984-1994). *Ent. mon. Mag.* **133**: 181-203), demonstrated that this was largely artefactual. There is a general consensus amongst coleopterists in the London area that *H. sedecimguttata* has become more frequent and numerous over the last decade. Nonetheless, it is still relatively less recorded than several other ladybirds. The current London and Essex ladybird surveys recorded eight reports in 1999, four of these were in Epping Forest and only one in urban London. Aggregation has been reported only rarely; Majerus & Williams (1989). The distribution and life history of the Orange ladybird, *Halysia sedecimguttata* (L.) (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae) in Britain *Ent. Gaz.* **40**: 71-78) noted small, over-wintering clusters and only eight incidences of more than 100 individuals to a site, most of these being on sycamore from one area of Norfolk/Suffolk. The very large populations in Epping Forest therefore seem exceptional and are probably linked to the recent mild winters and wet summers. Buchsbaum (1999. Massenflug von *Halysia sedecimguttata* (Linnaeus, 1761) in Istrien (Croatien) (Coleoptera, Coccinellidae). *Mitt. Thur. Entomologenverband.* **6**: 46-48), who points out that the species has Red Data Book status in some German states, regarded a large population in 1998 from Croatia as exceptional; he is not aware of any other large records from middle or southern Europe subsequent to his note.

My thanks to Gill & Keith Walker, Ken Hill, Jeremy Dagley and other Epping Forest staff for observations and information, to John Muggleton, Roger Hawkins and Ulf Buchsbaum for providing references and to these and several other coleopterists for their advice and opinions.— PAUL R MABBOTT, 49 Endowood Road, Millhouses, Sheffield S7 2LY.

Some autumn and winter observations of *Halyzia sedecimguttata* (L.) (Col.: Coccinellidae) with notes on a concentration of wintering ladybirds

On 24 October 1999 a concentration of ladybirds was discovered gathered upon fence posts along the margin of a small secondary wood near Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire. Present among them were at least 25 examples of the Orange Ladybird *Halyzia sedecimguttata*. The posts were beneath overhanging Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, a tree favoured by this species. Other familiar ladybirds were also present, notably large numbers of Sixteen-spot *Micraspis sedecimpunctata* (L.).

A return visit was made to the site on 6 February 2000, in an effort to arrive at a clear estimate of the number of wintering ladybirds present. The insects were found to be utilising some 400 metres of (mostly) wooden posts of varying diameter, and almost without exception were facing between north-east and south (the sides facing the wood). This observation parallels previous records reported by Adrian Fowles (Majerus, 1994. *Ladybirds*. New Naturalist's Series, HarperCollins, pp. 93-94). Fowles' interpretation, endorsed by Majerus, is that the ladybirds are taking up positions sheltered from prevailing south-west winds.

There were indications that wood which had been treated with timber preservative, as some of the larger posts had been, were unpopular. On this occasion only eight *H. sedecimguttata* were located. Most of these were on the posts themselves, either in exposed positions (but usually in company with other coccinellids), or in sheltered crevices, with one on the underside of a fence wire; one individual was active.

By far the most numerous species present was *M. sedecimpunctata*: extrapolating from a series of counts and estimates suggested that a total in excess of 50,000 were utilising the fence posts and the grass and other vegetation at their bases; it is likely that more were using this latter habitat than could be observed. Large aggregations of *M. sedecimpunctata* is not unusual – this species habitually forming large overwintering aggregations (Majerus *op. cit.*). Also present were 20 Seven-spots *Coccinella septempunctata* (L.) in a variety of locations and positions, just one Two-spot *Adalia bipunctata* (L.), and a single Kidney-spot *Chilocorus renipustulatus* (L.) active on a fence in the wood itself.

On 16 January 2000, a single *H. sedecimguttata* was discovered wintering inside a telephone box, of the modern open design, at Bricket Wood, Hertfordshire, a semi-natural woodland locality where the species has previously been recorded. The individual had adopted an inverted position against the roof of the box, similar to that employed by this and other ladybirds when utilising natural wintering sites on the underside of tree branches. It may be speculated that the insect had originally been attracted by the light, as moths often are to this and other public telephones.